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Use of Toxins and Other Lethal Chemicals in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan

Special National Intelligence Estimate
Volume I—Key Judgments

MORI/CDF

State Dept. review completed

Top Secret

SNIE 11/50/37-82JX

2 February 1982

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SNIE 11/50/37-82

USE OF TOXINS AND OTHER LETHAL
CHEMICALS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
AND AFGHANISTAN

Volume I—Key Judgments

Information available as of 27 January 1982
was used in the preparation of this Estimate.



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SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate presents the results of an intensive review by the US Intelligence Community of all available evidence on chemical warfare activities in Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. It also takes a brief second look at intelligence holdings on the 1963-67 Yemeni civil war and at the Soviet chemical-biological warfare program. The Estimate does not consider the arms control and disarmament aspects of the problem, nor does it examine in any depth the threat implications flowing from the employment of chemical weapons in local conflicts.

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While the Intelligence Community is confident of the key judgments which follow, many uncertainties remain concerning the full scope of Soviet activities in the chemical-biological warfare sphere, particularly the USSR's research and development program.

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This volume presents the basic Estimate. Volume II, published separately, contains a large amount of supporting data and analysis on the subjects covered in volume I. Volume II also includes a series of technical annexes that provide tabulations of reported attacks, details on the sample analyses, a technical description of trichothecene toxins, a bibliography of Soviet publications on these toxins, and other supporting documents

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KEY JUDGMENTS

Laos

Lao and Vietnamese forces, assisted by Soviet logistics and supervision, have used lethal chemical agents against H'Mong resistance forces and villages, causing thousands of deaths since at least 1976. Trichothecene toxins have been positively identified as one of the classes of agents used, but medical symptoms indicate that irritants, incapacitants, and nerve agents also have been employed.

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Kampuchea

Vietnamese forces have used lethal trichothecene toxins on Democratic Kampuchean troops and Khmer villages since at least 1978. Again, medical symptoms indicate that irritants, incapacitants, and nerve agents also have been used.

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The Soviet Role in Southeast Asia

The one hypothesis that best fits all the evidence is that the trichothecene toxins were developed in the Soviet Union, provided to the Lao and Vietnamese either directly or through transfer of technical know-how, and weaponized with Soviet assistance in Laos, Vietnam, and Kampuchea. There is no intelligence at hand to support alternative explanations, such as completely independent manufacture and use by the Vietnamese. It is highly probable that the USSR also provided other chemical warfare agents. While the evidence on the Soviet role does not constitute proof in the scientific sense, the Intelligence Community finds the case to be thoroughly convincing.

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Afghanistan

Soviet forces in Afghanistan have used lethal and casualty-producing agents on Mujahedin resistance forces and Afghan villages since the December 1979 invasion. There is some evidence that Afghan Government forces may have used chemical weapons provided by the USSR against the Mujahedin even before the invasion. No agents have been identified through sample analysis, but we conclude from analysis of all the evidence that attacks have been conducted with irritants, incapaci-

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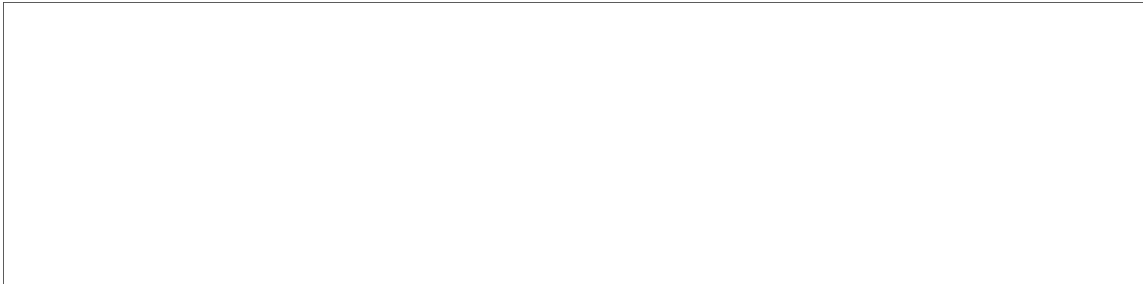


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tants, nerve agents, phosgene oxime, and perhaps trichothecene toxins, mustard, lewisite, and unidentified toxic smokes. 

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Implications

Our review of the chemical warfare evidence has yielded three findings with serious implications that need to be reflected in future threat estimates: (1) The Soviet Union has a well-developed program for the employment of chemical and toxin weapons. (2) The Soviet military consider the employment of chemical weapons by their forces and those of their allies to be an acceptable and effective means of suppressing resistance even in local wars. (3) There is a growing sense of alarm in countries like Thailand, Pakistan, and China in contemplating conflict with Soviet client states, and there is international concern that lethal chemical weapons may become an accepted method of warfare in limited conflicts throughout the Third World. 

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